

Organization and Change

Organizational structures are the right ones only for a specific set of problems and for a specific distribution of talent. As problems and personnel change, organizational forms should be altered.

Change consequently can only be introduced slowly. Without careful preparation, the attempted change will simply introduce chaos.

For relatively small groups the sharply reduced cost of communication permits a relatively full exchange of concepts without necessarily absorbing all energies in communications and leaving none for operations. Only within relatively small groups is there much opportunity for real flexibility. Small groups can change plans, can avoid advance commitment, can easily maintain options until decision points are reached. Substantive work outside of the pre-established mold can be efficiently accomplished only in small groups.

An organization's perception of the nature of its rival is based on an oversimplified and partially distorted interpretation of the rival's earlier behavior. Organizational momentum and insensitivity make difficult the recognition of gradual alteration in the rival's conduct which makes the predominant perception increasingly obsolescent. Only shocks bring major changes in the prevailing perception which therefore is adjusted only erratically and with lags.

Large organizations find it hard to anticipate, to recognize, or to adjust to change.

Changes in the environment can only be appreciated by small groups initially. Influencing a large organization - to get the prevailing doctrine changed - is a time consuming process.

The normal difficulty is intensified by the tendency for organizations to become obsessed with their current problems and activities.

Perhaps some alleviation can be attained by the freeing of a number of high officials from day-to-day functional tasks. Walter Bagehot's concept of the cabinet minister as an outsider, detached from the routine processes of administration and free to ask probing questions, is probably inapplicable in the American context. The American system requires that secretaries both manage and represent their departments. Yet, there may be room for something like a Special Assistant for Devil's Advocacy charged with the responsibility to raise challenges to the prevailing concepts.

Such organizations have difficulty in preserving flexibility and creativity and in preventing organizational doctrine and other constraining influences from snuffing out creativity. No doubt a major part of the answer is the better exploitation of the unique characteristics of the small group with its opportunities for low-cost communication and escape from organizational doctrine.

It is the higher-order objectives which in the long run are likely to prove most important and the most controversial. But for all the sensitivity on the subject, one has the feeling that talents and expertise are concentrated elsewhere, and that less attention is paid than is appropriate to higher-order objectives and the changes they must undergo as the environment changes.

Current issues absorb so much energy that comparatively little is left for considering such issues as the shape of the world and how it is changing and the appropriate higher-order objectives and how they will be influenced by external change. Achieving efficient management, while desirable in itself, may not be the most important thing in the long run. Some relief from the distractions of current pressures must be given so that energies can be devoted to study of higher-order objectives.

One indicator of success in large organizations is the willingness to delegate authority relatively far down the pyramid where compact work groups can be found. U.S. experience suggests that this is most crucial in the development area. Massive organizations with extensive communications at high, medium, and low levels will run up costs staggeringly. Reduced cost through devolution of responsibility could improve the payoff from R&D manyfold.

Planning

Cook's-tour planning rests, implicitly or explicitly, on the supposition that the future is sufficiently certain that we can chart a straight course years in advance.

Lewis-and-Clark planning acknowledges that many alternative courses of action and forks in the road will appear, but their precise character and timing cannot be anticipated. Neither the size or commitment nor even the direction of movement should be stipulated too far in advance. At the end of a period one can retrospectively examine the paths pursued, which include many abandoned initiatives or experiments and many hard (and possibly erroneous) choices.

The planning function is not to chart a precise course of action. Rather it is to prepare to cope with the uncertain terrain of the future.

The final measure of success is to stumble fewer times and in less important ways than one's national rivals. In evaluating recent defense planning one should keep in mind therefore that a .400 batting average is a very impressive achievement.

Successful planning in the long run may be set in partial contrast to efficient planning in the short run. An overweening concern with the microdetail of efficiency in the small may lead us to overlook what constitutes efficiency in the large, i.e., success.

With changing technology, sources of supply, tastes, and objectives, the proper inference would be to stress rough, indicative planning of the Lewis-and-Clark type.

A good plan can highlight those variables which will importantly influence the ultimate decision and can anticipate decision points. But a good plan should be viewed as a complicated structure to foster intelligent hedging. It ought not to be reviewed as a prescription of future activities.

R&D

In dealing with an unknowable future, much of the burden of hedging falls on the R&D program, preferably one of wide-ranging character. The purpose of R&D is not to provide for the future force structure per se, but rather to develop and to preserve options, which may or may not be taken up. Correctly viewed, a phenomenal R&D success does not necessarily imply acquisition and deployment, whereas, depending on the strategic situation, a partial R&D failure may be followed by acquisition and deployment. The purpose of R&D is to buy options. It should be recognized as the first phase of a sequential decision-making process. Its precise purpose is to reduce the time that would be required before the achievement of an operational capability. The low costs of preproduction R&D are accepted as insurance against a future demand -- without any commitment to the force and structure. Through an austere program, an impressive array of options can be provided. Numerous errors and incalculable waste can come from premature commitment to a system that turns out to be unnecessary. The moral is to delay such decisions until long lead-time items force the decision.

Systems Analysis

In the early years of enthusiasm an image was created that somehow systems analysis led directly to the appropriate decision. This is not, of course, the case. It is now more widely recognized that analysis cannot lead directly to decisions. Its purpose is to gather evidence to improve the quality of discussion, and to sharpen the intuitions of the decision-maker. While every effort should be made to reduce dependence on sheer intuition, the role of intuition at the conclusion remains embarrassingly large.

Dissent

How can one provide an effective channel for dissent without providing a forum for obscurantism?

Under the best of circumstances a really creative idea, because it is new, is hard to sell.

Effective organizations are not debating societies given over to dispute regarding nagging intellectual doubts or bureaucratic interests. Nevertheless, a sufficient channel for dissent must be maintained, so that the views of the dissenters are not irretrievably lost.

Needless to say, this is not a condemnation of Kremlinology per se, but a plea for better Kremlinology and its like. In existing work too much emphasis is placed on personalities and the policies they are presumed to represent and on public statements and their exegesis. Too little attention is paid to the broader picture of the decision-making process, to internal pressures, and to the real trend in capabilities. Also, too little attention is paid to past interpretative errors of our own. If the United States continues to obliterate defective images of its rivals without careful examination of just where we went astray, we shall never learn from our mistakes.

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